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# VENICE AND THE VENETO DURING THE RENAISSANCE

## THE LEGACY OF BENJAMIN KOHL



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# **Venice and the Veneto during the Renaissance: the Legacy of Benjamin Kohl**

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# Expansion, Instability, and Mobility in the Urban Élite of Renaissance Verona: The Example of the Verità Family

by Alison A. Smith

## 1. Introduction

This essay presents the results of research originally undertaken three decades ago in support of my doctoral dissertation on the history of the Verità family during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, after the Venetian takeover of the powerful and independent city-state of Verona<sup>1</sup>. Based on the rich series of fiscal and census documents – the *estimi* and the *anagrafi* – preserved in the Veronese state archives, I reconstructed the movements of Verità households and their wealth around the city and through the century. Other studies of Veronese noble families during the fifteenth century – a period of extraordinarily dynamic population growth and economic expansion – focus on particular branches of the families, but this one undertakes to trace all household heads with a Verità surname, a surname that gave all these households access to élite status and aristocratic privilege. The results of this survey of the Verità family demonstrate far more geographic mobility, economic instability and downward social mobility than historians of the Veronese élite have commonly assumed for prominent families eligible for membership in the City Council (the clearest indication of membership in the city's nobility)<sup>2</sup>. That the offspring of men and women with the greatest advantages of wealth and status regularly failed to maintain their position in

<sup>1</sup> Smith, 1990. In what follows, the terms *lira/lire* and *soldo/soldi* have been abbreviated as L. and s. There is no satisfactory map of Verona's urban neighbourhoods with accurate indications of their boundaries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; a nineteenth-century map is reproduced in Lanaro, 1982.

<sup>2</sup> See Grubb, ch. 7 and Lanaro, 1987. Gian Maria Varanini's many detailed studies of Verona's noble families (only some cited below) have provided historians of the city's élite with an essential foundation. Taken together, they show that both commerce and agriculture formed the basis of noble portfolios for most of the period. A similar pattern of geographic mobility and estate division in this period has been found for élite families in nearby Mantua. See Lazzarini, esp. 323.

society demonstrates the permeability of this élite, and complicates our understanding of the process of “aristocratization”<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. *Verità Households*

In the Verità family during the fifteenth century, younger sons tended to marry, move out of their father’s household, and establish their own residences, often in a distant neighborhood, or *contrada*<sup>4</sup>. This was a rather delicate and in many cases optimistic maneuver, appropriate to an expansive economy that awarded upward social mobility to men of ability and ambition who invested in trade and manufacturing as well as agricultural properties. The Verità family grew from four branches in 1409 (the first year that the *estimo*, or tax survey, was administered by the new Venetian overlords of the city) to sixteen in 1502 and then contracted to nine branches by 1653. This pattern of proliferating households during the fifteenth century has been found for other families in Verona and in other Italian renaissance cities<sup>5</sup>. In Verona, whenever a large estate was divided up among the heirs, this estate division was reported to the fiscal authorities, which then made appropriate adjustments to the tax assessments of the various heirs to the divided estate<sup>6</sup>. According to this record, the Verità family appears to have been among the families in renaissance Verona with the largest number of separate branches during this period. Only the Maffei and the Pellegrini families listed more estate divisions than the Verità between 1409 and 1536. Some older, established families – like the Verità – became so ramified in this period that many estate divisions were inevitable, and the fiscal authorities kept careful track of them so as not to lose track of lucrative sources of tax revenue.

In many cases, an estate division was a signal of increasing prosperity, and brothers would divide their estate in order to establish new branches of their family. All of the families with a high number of estate divisions were among the wealthiest and most prominent in the city, so the practice did not, in itself, weaken a family’s established position within the local aristocracy, although it did promote the geographical mobility of individual households discussed in this paper<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, as will be seen for the Verità, efforts to establish

<sup>3</sup> The literature on the “aristocratization” of Italian élites is vast. The terms of the debate were largely set by Angelo Ventura. See the very useful discussion of Ventura, with an up-to-date bibliography in Knapton.

<sup>4</sup> The term *contrada*, the term used to denote neighborhood for fiscal purposes in Verona, will be used interchangeably with neighborhood in this essay.

<sup>5</sup> For Verona, see especially Lodi (2002) as well as Varanini (1993), and Pellegrini, 23; on Florence see Kent, 26; Bizzocchi, 18-21; on Venice, see Romano, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Archivio di Stato di Verona (henceforth ASVr), *Archivio Comune*, regs. 281, 282. Seven other families list at least nine divisions (Caliari, Cipolla, Lazise, Morando, Pindemonte, Spolverini, and Zaccari), fifty-one families list more than two.

<sup>7</sup> These include prominent families such as the Maffei, Spolverini and Morando.

a new household in a new neighborhood could also expose the family to risk and economic decline. For the purposes of this paper, the “success” of a household or branch of the family is indicated by the maintenance of its wealth, and the transmission of that wealth to the direct male heir. This notion of success conforms to the ideal family and household described in the many contemporary treatises on the subject: the treatise writers recommended strategies that promoted multigenerational stability in a family palace managed by capable wives and populated by healthy children and loyal servants<sup>8</sup>. According to the Verità family evidence, this ideal was actually very difficult to achieve, and many households fell far short of it.

The data for this survey of the proliferation and residential mobility of the Verità family have been gleaned from the Veronese *estimo*. This tax survey was revised twenty-four times between 1409 and 1635, with an average interval of ten years separating each redaction. Many of the neighborhood household surveys (*anagrafi*) made in conjunction with each revision of the *estimo* survive and together record the existence of every individual household that succeeded in establishing itself for fiscal purposes for even a brief period<sup>9</sup>. We can find out which *contrada* (neighborhood) each household head lived in, his (or occasionally her) name and approximate age, as well as changes in the assessed wealth of the household head which corresponded to changes in residence and in the composition and size of the household. This latter information is especially rich for the sixteenth century, when many more of the *anagrafi* survive. It is also possible to determine when, in the life cycle of an individual or a household, major decisions may have been made, such as when to move or to divide property. When tracing family movement in successive volumes of the *estimo*, one can assume that households of some size and wealth did not move very frequently within the same *contrada*, and that only when a change in *contrada* was registered did that indicate an actual physical move. When the family owned a house in the *contrada* the taxpaying household of that name registered there almost certainly lived in the family home<sup>10</sup>. If the detailed information in the *estimo* is then integrated into the genealogical tree, a great deal can be learned about instability and decline within a powerful noble family, insights which rarely emerge from studies of the private archives or public records of the period<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Frigo.

<sup>9</sup> My preliminary survey of the Verità family in the *estimo* benefited greatly from the groundwork done by Cartolari, 269-77. Cartolari's list does not include all members of the family registered in the *estimo*, so by tracing the movements of individual patriline I hope to have tracked down all the Verità households registered in Verona between 1409 and 1635.

<sup>10</sup> On the preparation of the *anagrafi*, see Scarcella, 237-63, Lanaro, 1982 and Herlihy, 92.

<sup>11</sup> The genealogical groundwork for the Verità was done at the end of the sixteenth century by Alessandro Canobbio and continued in the mid-eighteenth century by Carlo Carinelli. My work on their genealogy, available in greater detail in my doctoral thesis, has modified and corrected some of Carinelli's information.

Using the *estimo* evidence to capture stories of decline and instability among Verità households helps to counteract the impression of powerful dynastic continuity conveyed by studies of noble families based largely on their private archives collected by the family itself. Only successful branches created archives that can be studied by modern historians, because family records were only worth keeping if they provided evidence for property and relationships that still had value for their heirs. However, focusing on the continuity of noble families distorts our understanding of the complex choices and ever-changing parameters that brought stability and longevity to a family or led them to instability, decline and disappearance from the historical record. The documentary bias in favor of patrilineal continuity also hides the bilateral kinship ties created by marriage and fostered by siblings, cousins and in-laws which were essential to the success of any household or family. Unfortunately these remain largely hidden in the *estimo* evidence because the full patronymics of the wives and other adult women living in a household were rarely given<sup>12</sup>. Using the *estimo* to reconstruct the story of household formation and dynastic succession also perpetuates the invisibility of one of the main protagonists in each story: the wife. The Verità evidence shows clearly that no one embarked on establishing a new household without a wife, who brought a large dowry, a fertile body and essential managerial skills to the enterprise. When widowed, this woman would occasionally be listed in the *estimo* as the head of the household, but rarely can we discover much more about her.

The increasing financial burden of a household, and certainly the expense of establishing a new one, deeply affected the demographic and residential behavior of urban aristocratic families in Verona. The building and rebuilding of these aristocratic palaces had a transformative effect on the urban fabric as well as the city's population. Paola Lanaro has traced the movement of the textile and other industries, which still employed a large percentage of the city's population, to peripheral *contrade* during this period<sup>13</sup>. The important collection of essays about the building of Renaissance Verona, *Edilizia privata nella Verona rinascimentale*, explores how the ancient center was rebuilt and remodeled according to the tastes of its aristocratic families<sup>14</sup>. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the four branches of the Verità family lived in separate, but neighboring, *contrade* near the old Roman amphitheater and the central thoroughfare of the city. As the number of branches proliferated, most settled in *contrade* that were quite distant from this earlier nucleus, although still in the old Roman center. By 1502, two of the thirteen Verità households registered had moved to the left bank of the Adige, and one hundred years later, the three most successful branches of the family were established in three

<sup>12</sup> On bilateral kinship, see esp. Chojnacki's collected essays.

<sup>13</sup> Lanaro, 1982, 71-79.

<sup>14</sup> The symbolic and ideological significance of this rebuilding in the sixteenth century is noted in Concina, 316-19. See, above all, Lanaro, Marini and Varanini: essays by Lodi, Varanini, Calabi, Mazzi.

new *contrade* quite far apart from each other. Whereas Verità households moved around the city with relative ease in the fifteenth century, the individual branches of the Verità family appear to have become increasingly isolated from one another, both economically and socially, as they formed stronger financial and material commitments to their urban homes and hence a dynastic identity separate from their cousins in other parts of the city. At least for this prominent noble family, therefore, there is little evidence for long-term allegiance to a particular neighborhood or palace in the city during the fifteenth century, unlike several other comparable families (the Pellegrini, Canossa, Bevilacqua, and Giusti, for example), whose principal branches remained attached to their ancestral palaces and neighborhoods throughout the period under consideration

Although Verona's fiscal archives permit us to reconstruct both the urban mobility and the fluctuations in prosperity of these Verità households, we must turn to the family's archives for more detailed information about their economic behavior. Unfortunately the surviving documents for this family illuminate the economic activities of only some of the most successful branches. Nevertheless, this information reveals a range of investment strategies that the Verità shared with other successful families in Verona. The basic principles of patrimonial organization at work as members of the Verità family acquired urban real estate and agricultural property during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were to maintain a diversified portfolio and, in the case of patrimonial divisions, to permit each heir who was a head of household to be financially independent. Their portfolios included a range of investments in trade and manufacturing; and the size and value of the family's urban residences increased significantly in proportion to other property over the course of this period<sup>15</sup>.

During this period wealthy aristocratic families invested in the thriving industrial and commercial sectors of the Veronese economy. The rapid rate with which some Verità patrimonies were both built up and dispersed suggests that they were involved in many high-yield, high-risk investments, rather than focusing their attention on more stable agricultural investments. The surviving archival sources privilege information about the accumulation of land and the management of investments by the descendants of Gabriele Verità, the youngest son and heir of the founder of the Falsorgo branch at the beginning of our period and one of the wealthiest men in Verona according to his tax assessment of L. 15 s. 15 in the *estimo* of 1433<sup>16</sup>. An analysis of Gabriele's estate,

<sup>15</sup> Varanini's many studies of Veronese noble families (1979, 1982, 1993, 1996) examine this behavior in great detail.

<sup>16</sup> The combined *estimo* assessments of Gabriele Verità and his son (and heir to half of his property, according to Gabriele's will) in S. Egidio in 1443 (ASVr, *Archivio Comune*, *Estimi* = CE, reg. 253, fols. 33<sup>r</sup>, 60<sup>r</sup>). ASVr, Ufficio del registro, *Testamenti*, mazzo 31, no. 93. This copy of the will is unpaginated, but due to its length (41 pages) I have assigned page numbers to it for convenience of reference herein. We do not know Gabriele's exact age, but his father died in the early 1370s,



inventoried in his will of 1439, reveals some of the principles of personal financial management adopted by a wealthy, successful household head in the early fifteenth century. He used the inventory in his will to divide his property between his two male heirs so that they each inherited a coherent, independent estate that would protect them from future threats to their economic well-being. Gabriele owned two large urban residences (one in Falsorgo and one purchased for his son, who established his own family in the contrada of S. Egidio). His urban interests included several stalls in the central marketplace that were rented out to the family notary, several wholesale clothing dealers, and a shoemaker<sup>17</sup>. His heirs also divided the duties of and income from the lucrative offices of *massarius* (steward) of the Veronese marketplace<sup>18</sup>.

In addition to these economic interests directly related to Veronese commercial life, Gabriele owned a miscellaneous collection of real estate within the city walls, which generated additional rents. Many of his rural holdings were in and around Bussolengo, where he owned two houses, at either end of the village, each with a large stone vat for olive oil. He also owned over 200 *campi* in various villages near Cerea in the Bassa Veronese. Through his wife, Gabriele inherited land in the village of Lavagno, which was to become the nucleus of the vast estate accumulated there by his descendants<sup>19</sup>. In his will, Gabriele generally confined joint ownership and influence to largely symbolic and highly visibly properties, and otherwise he divided his property into two independent and rational portfolios, each of which could easily stand on its own. Gabriele also made sure that various burdens on the patrimony associated with property and the future restitution of dowries were divided equitably between the two heirs. Each of the two lists of property begins with the urban residence of the heir, followed by the rents and real estate in Verona, which was a significant portion of the estate. Thus, even though they owned extensive agricultural land, the focus of their estate in the middle of the fifteenth century was on their urban property, and each household head, even in a powerful noble family, was expected to operate with a great deal of economic independence.

so in 1439 Gabriele must have been in his mid to late sixties, if not older. His sons, Giacomo and Bartolomeo, were in their teens in 1419 (this is the year of their correspondence with their teacher, Guarino da Verona: Sabbadini, 108-09).

<sup>17</sup> ASVr, *Testamenti*, mazzo 31 no. 93, fol. 32. The stalls were in Piazza Erbe and the nearby Casa dei Mercanti.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., fols 26, 32. The total annual income received from these offices was L. 581 for Michele and L. 341 for Bartolomeo, who received the most important office, the *massarius* of Piazza Erbe itself, as well as many more rents to be collected on urban property.

<sup>19</sup> ASVr, *Malaspina-Verità*, b. 17, perg. 24: the property appears to have been in his wife's family for some time. Gabriele married Abondantia q. Nicolò q. Belando de Belandi in 1384 (*Pergamene Malaspina-Verità*, b. 17, perg. 23); Abondantia wrote her will on 10 May 1445 (see *Pergamene Malaspina-Verità*, b. 18, perg. 39, and copy in *Pergamene Verità, Serie III*, b. 6, perg. 370). Gabriele refers to Clara de Bellando as the mother of his wife in his own will of 1439: *Testamenti*, mazzo 31, no. 93, fol. 14.

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, both of the main branches of the Verità family surveyed below also took advantage of the invaluable economic opportunity offered by the sale of confiscated Della Scala property in the *fattoria scaligera*. For Veronese families with ready cash, this was an invaluable social opportunity as well. In acquiring the land, many families like the Verità acquired the “feudal” rights and privileges associated with it that later became so important for enhancing their claims to aristocratic status<sup>20</sup>. Verità, the founder of the Ferraboi branch in the late fourteenth century, bought a large block of property in Soave from the *fattoria scaligera*, and also acquired the fief of Selva di Progno<sup>21</sup>. The three sons of Bonmartino Verità, the founder of the S. Zeno descent group, also took full advantage of the sale of property in the *fattoria scaligera*. They bought land and *decima* (tithe) rights, spending even more than their wealthy cousin Verità in Ferraboi<sup>22</sup>. Both of the main descent groups of the Verità family appear to have enjoyed a similar level of prestige at the start of the fifteenth century: both were represented in the City Council and both produced household heads who succeeded in rapidly increasing the size of their patrimony (indicated by their tax assessment in the *estimo*)<sup>23</sup>.

### 3. The Ramification of the Verità Family

All Verità households were united by descent from a common ancestor and used the same coat of arms, but by the end of the fifteenth century only some of them had concrete property interests or close kinship ties in common. Although the evidence for residential mobility among the Verità is irrefutable, it is not always clear why individuals and households moved from place to place. For some members of the family a stable domestic establishment may not have been very important; for others it may have remained an elusive goal. Those who moved around continued to identify with other members of their patriline (according to their wills and burial practices), with whom they may even have shared property, such as country estates and commercial investments. In their wills, dowry agreements and other private contracts,

<sup>20</sup> Sancassani, 6. The importance of this commercial opportunity for the futures of Veronese families who took advantage of it is discussed by Varanini, 1993, 23-24.

<sup>21</sup> Sancassani, 9, 23, 25. Verità's *estimo* assessment was L. 17, by far the largest of all the Verità households listed in 1409: ASVr, CE reg. 249, fol. 46r. The fief of Selva di Progno cost D. 2,571 s. 20 and had been organized as a *feudo* by the Della Scala and tied up with land and rights controlled by the bishop of Verona. In the middle of the sixteenth century, this branch of the family invoked their “feudal” privileges in the Selva di Progno when attempting to acquire the feudal title of Count. See ASVr, *Malaspina-Verità*, proc. 3216.

<sup>22</sup> Sancassani. The sons of Bonmartino invested as much as D. 5,456, whereas Verità of Ferraboi spent a total of D. 4,142.

<sup>23</sup> Cartolari, 269.

members of the Verità family expressed their personal sense of position within the family in terms of their immediate paternal affiliation, or patriline. The several patriline that eventually descended from a single man and established themselves in different parts of the city will be referred to here as a descent group<sup>24</sup>. Whereas patriline and descent group refer to vertical genealogical relationships across generations, I use the term household to describe the assortment of relatives living under one roof at any given time and serving as the basic fiscal unit in Verona. It was in the household where important bilateral kinship ties developed, among brothers and sisters, cousins, and their in-laws, creating a system of relationships that both complemented and conflicted with the basic patriarchal organization of property and inheritance. According to a simple typology of households, the conjugal household contained the married couple and their children, the stem household included a third generation (usually the grandchildren), and the joint-family household comprised two related conjugal families (usually the families of two married brothers)<sup>25</sup>. The Verità households in this period included examples of all three – conjugal, stem and joint – in many cases extended by surviving members from older generations, and unmarried, orphaned, or illegitimate kin.

Important changes in the composition of a household were usually caused by the transfer of control over family and property from one generation to the next. Among the Verità this occurred upon the death of the father, when the estate could be divided, but married sons occasionally moved out before their father died, and before inheriting their share of the estate. In most Verità households there was a significant fluctuation in the number of family members resident in a household at any one time, caused largely by periods of child-bearing followed by periods in which most of the children moved away. Pairs of brothers who were both married, and who did not wish to divide their estate, or to leave their ancestral home, occasionally formed joint-family households, but biological, economic and emotional factors discouraged their duration. For example, if a couple did have more than one son, and those two brothers decided to live together after their father's death, they might not both survive long enough to marry and have children of their own. If two sets of first cousins did grow up in the same household, the complexity of the group almost always led to the division of the household and the estate in the next generation.

The number of Verità households in the *estimo* grew from five in 1409 to nineteen in 1502. These households represented four branches of the family in 1409 and sixteen branches in 1502. As the chart in the Appendix shows, the total number of Verità households began to decline by 1595, and by 1636, the twelve

<sup>24</sup> Segalen, 47, on the term "descent group": "a multi-functional kinship group,... descended from this or that mythical ancestor", whose members "share a certain number of rights or duties with certain relatives".

<sup>25</sup> Wheaton, 609, argues that this simple typology developed over one hundred year ago by Le Play, still describes early modern households adequately.

Verità households registered in Verona's *estimo* represented nine separate branches, or patriline, of the family. During the sixteenth century, therefore, there continued to be about the same number of Verità households registered in each *estimo*, and several new ones were formed between every two revisions. Because the number of households remained constant, for every new one formed another household disappeared, usually when their members died, married or left Verona. The disappearance of a household, however, did not necessarily mean the extinction of a branch, because sometimes two households living in one house fused, for fiscal purposes, after the death of an older member. This survey of all Verità households in Verona shows that whereas in the fifteenth century most sons and many daughters married, by the sixteenth century, they began to adopt various strategies to limit the number of sons and daughters who married in order to preserve their patrimonies and to conserve their wealth for the next generation. Limiting marriage in order to preserve the integrity of the family patrimony, however, carried a greater risk of the extinction of a branch's direct male descent, which would compromise the identity of the dynasty<sup>26</sup>. The Verità evidence suggests that the decision to permit a son or daughter to marry continued to be affected by a wide range of factors beyond the family's control, including the fertility of a couple and the specter of premature death. At the level of the individual household, therefore, what might appear in the historical record to be a clearly calculated decision about marriage limitation might well have been a response to a range of other pressures on household formation and dynastic succession that are hidden from us.

#### 4. Verità households descended from Bonmartino in S. Zeno in Oratorio

This section of the essay will trace the movements of the highly mobile descendants of Bonmartino in the *contrada* of S. Zeno in Oratorio before discussing the generally more prominent and longer-lived branches established by their cousins descending from Gabriele in the *contrada* of Falsorgo. By the end of the fourteenth century the household heads of the two main descent groups of the family had only a great-grandfather in common. They lived in the centrally-located *contrada* of Falsorgo, and in S. Zeno in Oratorio, a newer *contrada* upriver from the Castelveccchio. The descendants of the Falsorgo descent group produced most of the archival material preserved for the Verità family and were generally more successful than their cousins living in S. Zeno<sup>27</sup>. Already at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the division of the family into

<sup>26</sup> In his study of the Milanese patriciate, which adopted similar strategies of marriage limitation and estate preservation, Zanetti calculated that there was a fifty percent extinction rate of direct male lines after only three generations: chap. 3.

<sup>27</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 249, fols. 40r, 46r, 115r, 50v. The combined assessment figure for the three households of the Falsorgo branch in 1409 is L. 31, whereas that of the two first cousins descended from the S. Zeno goldsmith is only L. 10 s. 10.

two descent groups was revealed by their choice of residence, their choice of names, their choice of professions and their choice of tomb. Names such as Zeno, Ognibene, and Bonmartino occurred frequently in the S. Zeno group whereas the group of households living in Falsorgo and neighboring Ferraboi were fond of naming their children Gabriele, Michele and Marco. Both groups used Verità as a given name quite often. Bonmartino's descendants preferred to be buried in the family tomb in S. Anastasia whereas Gabriele's chose their tomb in S. Eufemia<sup>28</sup>. The household head in S. Zeno in Oratorio continued his father's profession of goldsmith, but by 1409 his younger brother had moved to the *contrada* of S. Maria alla Fratta and become a furrier. Verità q. Giacomo of Ferraboi, the eldest and most distinguished member of the Falsorgo group of Verità (he was knighted by the Carrara in 1404), was consistently identified in the documents as a wholesale clothing merchant (*scapizator*). His second wife was the daughter of a goldsmith<sup>29</sup>, and his younger brother Benedetto was a banker (*campesor*)<sup>30</sup>. Hence the Verità, notwithstanding their wealth and high social and political position, regularly identified themselves as merchants in official documents in the early fifteenth century.

This survey of household formation, division and movement will present the *estimo* evidence in the form of brief narratives. Census data cannot tell us about particular strategic decisions that a family might have made in the face of economic and demographic pressures, but they do allow us to reconstruct a story of change and adaptation. The households descending from the S. Zeno branch of the Verità proliferated more quickly than did those from Falsorgo in the fifteenth century. This was largely because the S. Zeno descent group had more sets of sons, who were, in turn, more likely to divide up their fathers' estates, marry, and move away, than were their counterparts from Falsorgo. It may be that the high level of residential mobility of the descendants of Bonmartino in S. Zeno was a factor that discouraged their eventual establishment at the higher levels of the Veronese élite achieved by some of the descendants of their cousins living in Falsorgo and Ferraboi. As discussed above, the two descent groups appear to have begun the fifteenth century and the advent of Venetian rule with similar access to status and wealth. This pattern of mobility among households descending from Bonmartino seems to have been well established by the beginning of the fifteenth century, as the family had only recently moved to the *contrada* of S. Zeno in Oratorio<sup>31</sup>. After

<sup>28</sup> Grubb's reconstruction of the Verità family in the fifteenth century omits the branch descended from Bonmartino di S. Zeno in Oratorio, leading him to claim that the entire "gens" chose S. Eufemia for burial in the fifteenth century: 104.

<sup>29</sup> BCV, Carinelli, 1951: her name was Dorotea, daughter of Francesco *Avogar* dalle Passioni.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, ASVr, *Pergamene Verità, Serie III*, b. 1, perg. 34, 55, 68.

<sup>31</sup> The Bonmartino we meet in the *estimo* of 1409 did not move there until after 1373 (ASVr, *Pergamene Verità, serie III*, v. 1, perg. 55), and his father lived in the *contrada* of S. Croce in 1345 (ASVr, *Pergamene Bevilacqua-Verità*, b. 111, perg. 24: Bartolomeo q. Giacomo Verità di Falsorgo bought land in Bussolengo from Verità q. Bonmartino di S. Croce).

Bonmartino's death, the joint-family household maintained by his three sons in S. Zeno split up when Venice imposed a crippling fine on the eldest for illegal activity as *massarius* (steward) of the Salt Office<sup>32</sup>. The descendants of Bonmartino's son Giacomo tended to be prolific, independent, and energetic, and the young men typically divided their estates at each generation and struck out on their own. Some did quite well, according to their tax assessments, but none enjoyed stability or residential continuity. The descendants of Bonmartino's son Paolo, on the other hand, settled for several generations in the *contrada* of Pigna, but biological and economic misfortune eventually brought an end to the only long-lived branch there.

The line descending from Giacomo q. Bonmartino prospered in the fifteenth century as they moved from S. Zeno to S. Michele alla Porta and then, in 1456, to S. Benedetto<sup>33</sup>. This household had six sons, however, and rather than pool their resources, most of them set off on their own<sup>34</sup>. The independence of these brothers from each other and from their patriline is shown by the fact that they did not try to keep their father's house in S. Benedetto in the family after the brother who inherited it died without a direct male heir in the 1530s. Extraordinary residential mobility characterized the life of the eldest brother Leonardo, who moved away from his father's house by 1447, and then lived with his wife and children in a different *contrada* every year the *estimo* revised. When Leonardo died in 1482, his two sons split their father's small estate and eventually left Verona to live in Nogara, where they owned land<sup>35</sup>, choosing to remove themselves from city life and accept a significant fall in status.

Another one of these brothers was very successful, and moved to the *contrada* of S. Eufemia in 1492 with his widowed mother and young family<sup>36</sup>. His three sons, however, divided up their father's estate just as their uncles

<sup>32</sup> ASVr, *Archivio Comune*, reg. 9, fol. 29v; on the division of the brothers' patrimony, CE Reg. 251, fol. 126v. In 1406-1407 Verità q. Bonmartino was *massarius* of salt in Verona. Eventually Verità amassed a debt of over D. 6,000 for salt revenues he owed to the government, and the Venetian Senate, after many ineffective threats, finally forced him to auction property to cover the debt. In 1422, due to self-proclaimed poverty, he promised to pay Venice the balance in wheat and flour by harvest-time (ASVr, *Camera Fiscale*, reg. 3, fols. 38r, 42v, 44v and 45r; *Archivio Comune*, reg. 6, fol. 29v. I thank John Law for these references). Verità's son, Bonmartino, in his will of February 4, 1453, revealed his lowered expectations for his family, dividing his property equally among his two sons and two daughters: ASVr, *Testamenti*, mazzo 45, no. 22. In 1456 the thirty-year-old Verità q. Bonmartino (the great-grandson of the first Verità in the *contrada*) was registered in the *estimo* at L. 1 s. 8 (CE reg. 255, fol. 129r). This patriline disappeared from the Veronese *estimo* by 1456.

<sup>33</sup> In ASVr, CE reg. 252, fol. 55v (1433), Benedetto q. Giacomo q. Bonmartino was registered in S. Michele alla Porta at L. 3 s. 15; by 1456 he moved to S. Benedetto and was registered at L. 8 s. 15 (CE reg. 255, fol. 69v).

<sup>34</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 256, fol. 69v. Each son was assessed at L. 1 s. 10 d. 8 after the estate division.

<sup>35</sup> On the purchase of land in Nogara from the «Fattoria scaligera» by the three sons of Bonmartino de Verità, see Sancassani and Varanini (1979), 149 and n. 301.

<sup>36</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 259, fol. 73v.



had done a generation earlier, and although some stayed in the S. Eufemia house for a while, they never did very well economically, according to their tax assessment<sup>37</sup>. This pattern continued during the sixteenth century, as the many descendants of Giacomo q. Bonmartino continued to divide their patrimony among numerous sons who moved about the city or left it altogether. One of these, Bernardino q. Gabriele, eventually established the S. Paolo branch that continued through the eighteenth century<sup>38</sup>.

The descendants of Paolo Verità, the youngest son of Bonmartino the goldsmith (the founder of the S. Zeno branch), settled in the *contrada* of Pigna in the mid-fifteenth century and prospered there for a while<sup>39</sup>. However, during the sixteenth century the Verità households in Pigna provide two contrasting examples of downward mobility associated with residential stability. The brothers who moved to Pigna with their families in 1465 lived together in a large, joint-family household<sup>40</sup>, but their cooperation did not continue into the next generation, when the two sets of first cousins split apart into two separate households. One household included four brothers in their twenties living with their widowed mother. These young men divided up their property equally among themselves, but continued to live together, each employing a few servants<sup>41</sup>. They continued their cousins' pattern of estate divisions at each generation, although they continued to live together in Pigna, even though they considered their household property separate for fiscal purposes. Only one of these four brothers ever married, and his descendants, whose tax assessments never rose above L. 3, eventually moved to a nearby *contrada* in 1572<sup>42</sup>.

The other set of first cousins included only one son, and the patriline in Pigna descending from this man had difficulty perpetuating itself due to high levels of mortality and infertility. By 1531, Zeno was a young man living alone in his grandfather's house with five servants<sup>43</sup>. He soon married, but he and his wife had no legitimate children, so they legitimated a son and daughter. Between 1518 and 1545, Zeno more than doubled the value of his father's estate<sup>44</sup>. Given his economic success, Zeno probably wished to ensure the permanent establishment of his branch of the family at the higher levels of the Veronese aristocracy, and so legitimated a son rather than bequeath his

<sup>37</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 261, fol. 73. Bernardino testated on 28 September, 1508. *Testamenti*, mazzo 100, no. 167.

<sup>38</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 266, fol. 454v (1558).

<sup>39</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 256, fol. 70v (1456); Paolo probably died soon after he testated on 17 Dec. 1448 (*Testamenti*, mazzo 40, no. 111).

<sup>40</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 256, col. 70v; CE reg. 257, fol. 66v; CE reg. 258, fols. 73v-74r.

<sup>41</sup> ASVr, CE regs. 254-62; *Anagrafi-Comune*, nos. 912, 913, 914, 917, 918.

<sup>42</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 267, fol. 188v.

<sup>43</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 263, fol. 138r; *Anagrafi-Comune*, no. 913. A year later he inherited more property from the estate of his sister.

<sup>44</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 262, fol. 90v (1518) and reg. 264, fol. 191v (1545). It is not clear in the surviving documents who the parents of their legitimated son and daughter were.

patrimony to his impoverished cousins who lived nearby<sup>45</sup>. This behavior indicates the attenuation of ties to more distant kin in favor of preserving the dynastic continuity of the patriline, a pattern observed in many noble families during the sixteenth century.

This narrative tracing the movements of diverging branches of the Verità family will now turn to the foundation of the Verità Poeta, a branch descended from Zeno, the brother of Bonmartino the goldsmith, who decisively broke away from the Verità family in the early fifteenth century. Zeno's son and grandson accumulated a great fortune, and in the absence of more than one direct male heir, their fortune remained intact until the early sixteenth century. Then the familiar story of estate divisions and movement away from the ancestral *contrada* of S. Maria alla Fratta began. This group includes one example of a wealthy household that moved several times before it settled down in one *contrada*, which suggests that as late as the mid-sixteenth century residential mobility was not incompatible with success at the highest levels of the local nobility.

The reasons for the detachment of the Verità Poeta from the S. Zeno nucleus, signaled by a new name as well as by a change in profession, of residence and eventually of financial status, are still obscure. In the *estimo* of 1425, the founder's grandson dropped the qualifier *draperius* (cloth merchant), and registered himself instead as "Bartholomeus de Veritate dictus Poeta" in the *contrada* of S. Maria alla Fratta<sup>46</sup>. Perhaps this man, who made so much money in those years – the household tax assessment, which was L. 1 s. 10 in 1409, grew to L. 20 s. 3 by 1482 – wished to distinguish himself from the others in the Verità family by adopting an additional name that could only lend prestige. The first Verità designated Poeta to join the City Council did so in 1437<sup>47</sup>. The Verità Poeta branch constituted by this move retained the traditional coat of arms used by their Verità relatives, and their level of wealth and social prestige seems to have remained comparable to those of other branches of the Verità family. They had effectively distanced themselves from the rest of the Verità by 1439, however, according to the revised will of Gabriele Verità of Falsorgo. In his previous will, dated 1424, Gabriele had included the S. Maria alla Fratta household with the other members of the Verità family who were to divide his property equally in the absence of a direct male heir<sup>48</sup>. When Gabriele revised the will fifteen years later, he no longer included the Verità Poeta branch in the list<sup>49</sup>. The Verità Poeta residence in S. Maria alla

<sup>45</sup> Zeno's will and codicil were dated 20 and 22 July, 1549: ASVr, *Testamenti*, mazzo 141, nos. 255 and 256.

<sup>46</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 251, fol. 52r. Lenotti, 178, following earlier family histories, suggests that this addition to the surname Verità was due to intermarriage with the Poeta family of Bologna, but I have found no archival evidence to support this claim.

<sup>47</sup> Cartolari, 269.

<sup>48</sup> ASVr, *Testamenti*, mazzo 16, no. 291.

<sup>49</sup> ASVr, *Testamenti*, mazzo 31, no. 93. The blood relationship between Gabriele's and Bartolomeo's



Fratta contained a very large and wealthy household by the end of the fifteenth century. Like many others in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, however, the men in the next two generations chose instead to strike out on their own and to establish new households in quite separate parts of the city. They apparently considered their family patrimony to be large enough to endow several sons with sufficient property to set off on their own, but these men did not establish themselves elsewhere with ease.

The strongest, wealthiest branch of the Verità Poeta descent group in the sixteenth century is a good example of a highly mobile household that maintained its considerable wealth: Gerolamo q. Giovanni Verità Poeta moved away from S. Maria alla Fratta in 1502 and lived with his family in three different *contrade* before settling down in the *contrada* of S. Pietro in Carnario in 1572<sup>50</sup>. This branch had the good fortune to produce a strong succession of direct male heirs; but it died out soon after 1605 when the young heir, Gerolamo, was convicted of murder, and the Venetian authorities confiscated much of his property<sup>51</sup>.

##### 5. *Verità households descended from Giacomo in Falsorgo*

It is now time to shift our focus to the branches of the Verità family that have left by far the largest footprint on the archival record. Several of these exemplify the strong correlation between residential continuity and direct dynastic succession seen in other Veronese families. Charting the residence patterns of several generations of this group of Verità, however, reveals many destabilizing factors, even in aristocratic establishments that maintained both their patrimonial and residential stability. In light of the residential and social mobility in Verità households discussed thus far, this next group leads us to consider the principal factors that granted continuity to a particular domestic establishment. All of the following examples suggest that forces beyond the control of a particular couple or group of siblings tended to discourage the long-term stability of a domestic establishment, even at the highest levels of wealth. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the founders of the Falsorgo and S. Zeno descent groups enjoyed similar wealth and status, and, according to Gabriele's wills discussed above, they felt strong ties to the Verità lineage. A century later, the diverging paths of these two descent groups revealed differing

branches of the family, however, was no more distant than that between Gabriele and two of the four households that he did name in this later will.

<sup>50</sup> Based on the *estimo* registers in the ASVR, they moved from Pigna (CE reg. 260, fol. 101r; reg. 261, fol. 91v), to S. Eufemia (CE reg. 262, fol. 70r; reg. 263, fol. 105r) to S. Quirico (CE reg. 264, fol. 16v; reg. 266, fol. 15v) to S. Pietro in Carnario (CE reg. 267, fol. 53v).

<sup>51</sup> ASVR, *Archivio Campagna*, proc. 1370, 1371, 1373. Homicide and other forms of violence were increasingly common among nobles on the Terraferma in this period. See Povolo and Faggion, among others.

strategic approaches to their domestic arrangements. Not surprisingly, the households that moved about the city most often tended to be the least complex, conjugal units. Very few of Bonmartino's descendants formed joint-family households. Members of the Falsorgo descent group, on the other hand, exhibited greater loyalty to ancestral houses and neighborhoods, leading to the formation of complex joint-family households.

Nonetheless, estate divisions and residential mobility were also characteristic of many households descended from the ancestors in Falsorgo. Four of its most long-lived branches were founded by eldest sons who moved away from the house of their birth, either before or after their father's death. By the mid-sixteenth century, the three wealthiest and most prominent branches of the Verità family lived in the *contrade* of Ferraboi, S. Fermo, and S. Giovanni in Foro, and all three were newly established<sup>52</sup>. The house in Ferraboi commanded the greatest allegiance throughout this period, but there is little evidence that its proximity to the ancestral *contrada* of Falsorgo made any real difference to the high status and wealth of the family by the sixteenth century. The initial success of the S. Egidio branch as well as the success of the branch that it spawned in S. Giovanni in Foro further show that the social geography of the Verità was characterized by residential independence. This independence was further promoted by the patrimonial organization discussed above.

Giacomo Verità, the founder of the Falsorgo branch in the later fourteenth century, presided over the growth of a large, complex, joint family household there that eventually included several of his married sons as well as his oldest grandson's family. One son, Verità, soon moved out and established a new household in Ferraboi, and Giacomo's grandson, Bartolomeo, later moved from Falsorgo to S. Egidio. By the 1430s, therefore, the descendants of Giacomo's large Falsorgo household had split up and formed three branches of the family, in Falsorgo, in Ferraboi, and in S. Egidio, each associated with a large house. During the later fifteenth century the ancestral Falsorgo house was inhabited by Giacomo's great-grandson, Michele, and his conjugal family. After Michele's death in exile<sup>53</sup>, his two sons, Giacomo and Gerolamo, lived alone in the Falsorgo house for nearly three decades, without taking steps to marry and produce an heir. Gerolamo – an internationally famous poet and

<sup>52</sup> These three branches were genealogically distinct, they lived in three different parts of the city, and they each had a villa in a different part of the Veronese territory, catalogued in Viviani. The S. Fermo branch owned "il Boschetto" in Lavagno (the most famous of the villas identified with the Verità family), on the road to Soave (Viviani, 539-41), currently owned by the Fraccaroli family; the S. Giovanni in Foro branch owned the so-called Villa Turco in Arbizzano-Negrar in the Valpolicella (Viviani, 461-62), currently owned by Dante Serego Alighieri; and the Ferraboi branch owned the Villa Verità in Concmarise in the Bassa Veronese (Viviani, 707), currently owned by Bruno Bresciani (see Bresciani, 40-41).

<sup>53</sup> Soranzo, 419. ASVr, *Archivio Comune*, reg. 13, fol. 189v; Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Misti Consiglio Dieci*, reg. 24, fol. 142.

political leader of the city – did marry after his older brother died, however, and had a family of his own<sup>54</sup>.

Verità de Verità, who was knighted by the Carrara in 1404, soon moved out of his father's house in Falsorgo to found a new branch of the family next door in the *contrada* of Ferraboi<sup>55</sup>. Unfortunately, however, his son died childless, so his share of the family property passed to his nephew Antonio, who took over the house in the 1430s<sup>56</sup>. Antonio's two grandsons formed a joint-family household in Ferraboi which grew in size and complexity as their tax assessment rose rapidly during the second half of the fifteenth century, to L. 22 in 1518, making them one of the wealthiest households in Verona<sup>57</sup>. The brothers probably continued to live together because only one of them succeeded in producing a male heir, named Francesco. Francesco, in turn, had only one son, named Verità, who married at the young age of seventeen in order to increase the likelihood of producing a male heir himself<sup>58</sup>. Unfortunately this tactic failed, and both Verità and his young wife soon died childless, extinguishing the direct male line of descent after only three generations<sup>59</sup>.

Nearly twenty years elapsed between the extinction of the Ferraboi patriline and the final division of the large Ferraboi estate in 1541 between the many claimants to a share of the patrimony<sup>60</sup>. The principal beneficiary of the settlement in 1541 was Gerolamo, then the head of the Falsorgo branch, and his four legitimate sons, young adults at the time of the settlement, and when Gerolamo died in 1552, the inheritance subsequently divided by his sons included both the ancestral Falsorgo residence and the Ferraboi house originally acquired by their ancestors in the 1430s. The two older sons, Michele and Giacomo, inherited what must have been the smaller home in Falsorgo, because they promptly sold it to buy another house on the other side of town in the fashionable *contrada* of S. Fermo<sup>61</sup>. Their two younger brothers

<sup>54</sup> ASVr, *Anagrafi-Comune*, no. 260. Gerolamo married in 1514, just before he turned forty.

<sup>55</sup> On this man, see Varanini, 1979, 32; and Dalla Corte, vol. II, 337-38, 358-60, 369. Verità continued to use the title until his death, but it was not inherited by his son Marco.

<sup>56</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 252, fol. 38r; according to the *estimo*, Antonio and his family were living with his nephew, Gabriele, and his family in Falsorgo before the Ferraboi house became available for them to move into: CE reg. 249, fol. 40v; reg. 250, fol. 28v; reg. 251, fol. 39.

<sup>57</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 256, fol. 39r; reg. 257, fol. 34r; reg. 258, fol. 37v; reg. 259, fol. 47v; *Anagrafi-Comune*, nos. 312, 313, 314. By 1518, the tax assessment of this patriline was L. 22 s. 1, one of the highest in Verona.

<sup>58</sup> ASVr, *Anagrafi-Comune*, no. 316.

<sup>59</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 263, fol. 64v; See also *Malaspina-Verità*, b. 216, proc. 2314 (estate division).

<sup>60</sup> ASVr, *Malaspina-Verità*, b. 216, proc. 2314. On the procedural difficulties leading to the settlement of the estate, and the final judgment of Venice's Council of Ten, see *Malaspina-Verità*, b. 183, proc. 1919.

<sup>61</sup> On the sale of the Falsorgo house, see ASVr, *Malaspina-Verità*, b. 207, proc. 2219, fols. 2-3, 4-5. The house in S. Fermo (current address: vicoletto Leoni, no. 6-8) is discussed briefly in Dal Forno, at "V".

inherited the house in Ferraboi. With Gerolamo's sons in the mid-sixteenth century, therefore, the Falsorgo and Ferraboi patrimonies were fused and redivided, and the smaller, ancestral house in Falsorgo sold. Their allegiance to the neighborhood their patriline had lived in for two hundred years was not strong enough to counteract their desire for larger, more elegant establishments elsewhere.

The final group of Verità households to be discussed in this essay descended from the eldest son of Giacomo Verità (the founder of the Falsorgo branch at the end of the fourteenth century), who moved out of his ancestral home to found a new branch of the family in the *contrada* of S. Egidio. Although this group prospered in the fifteenth century, estate divisions and other difficulties caused its ultimate failure in spite of significant residential continuity<sup>62</sup>. The composition of the household in S. Egidio and that of the branch it spawned in S. Giovanni in Foro are good examples of the expansion and contraction in household size and complexity characteristic of more stable domestic establishments in this period. By 1501 the S. Egidio household had shifted from a large, conjugal family to a classic example of a stem family: the oldest son, Gabriele was living with his elderly father, several unmarried younger brothers, his wife, and five children of his own<sup>63</sup>. When his father died in 1507, Gabriele immediately moved away from S. Egidio to establish his family in the neighboring *contrada* of S. Giovanni in Foro<sup>64</sup>. After Gabriele moved away from S. Egidio, one of Gabriele's brothers, Bartolomeo, who remained behind, married and had three children<sup>65</sup>. This small, conjugal family grew for a while again, as they had children, but when the children reached adulthood, divided up their patrimony and moved away, the only ones who stayed in the S. Egidio home were an elderly widow and her three unmarried sons. After 1572, the S. Egidio residence passed out of the Verità family for good, as the branch itself, victim of patrimonial divisions and economic decline, disappeared from view<sup>66</sup>.

<sup>62</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 252, fol. 656r. Their house in S. Egidio is currently known as the Palazzo Lanfranchini, at via Emilei, 17 (Dal Forno, at "V"). On the exceptional quality of its late fifteenth-century decoration, see Newman, 278-79. Newman and others have attributed this building to the Verità family because of the Verità coat of arms carved into the capitals of two of the late fifteenth-century columns in the courtyard. He suggests that it belonged to the S. Benedetto branch of the family who, in the 1470s, just when Newman dates the decoration, divided their patrimony among their sons and left the *contrada* (CE reg. 256, fols. 67r, 69v, and CE reg. 257, fols. 64r, 65r). The *contrada* of S. Egidio was adjacent to S. Benedetto, and it seems much more likely, therefore, that this house belonged to the son of Bartolomeo, who was rapidly increasing his wealth in the 1460s and 1470s, according to the *estimo*.

<sup>63</sup> ASVr, *Anagrafi-Comune*, no. 199.

<sup>64</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 260, fol. 87r; fol. 65v; fol. 93r.

<sup>65</sup> The families of Bartolomeo and his brother Gabriele may have constituted a joint-family household for a while before the death of their father.

<sup>66</sup> ASVr, CE reg. 267, fol. 157v, and *Anagrafi-Provincia*, no. 229.

The experience of these three generations of the S. Egidio branch of the family shows how difficult it could be, on the one hand, to ensure a direct male line of succession and, on the other, to maintain a patrimony intact in the presence of several sons and daughters. Further, it shows how men were likely to postpone marriage in order to accommodate their own offspring in the family's establishment, and how that contributed to a household's complex and extended generational spread. The death of a father or older brother could thrust the headship of the family and the household on someone unexpectedly. In this case, Bartolomeo became head of the household in S. Egidio after the death of his father and departure of his brother Gabriele between 1501 and 1514. Eventually Bartolomeo's younger brother Bernardino took over the household as its wealth diminished, and Bernardino's widow presided over her three unmarried sons during the final years of the S. Egidio branch.

In contrast to the brothers he left behind in S. Egidio, Gabriele met with success in S. Giovanni in Foro and established a branch of the family that acquired a great deal of cultural and political prestige toward the end of the sixteenth century. This branch, however, had difficulties perpetuating the direct male line, perhaps because of a conscious effort to limit the number of sons who married in each generation. Gabriele moved to S. Giovanni in Foro with his wife and five young children, but died soon thereafter<sup>67</sup>. His two surviving sons lived out their lives together in S. Giovanni in Foro, but only one of them married, and that couple had only one son, Gasparo. Gasparo was married by age fifteen, in order to ensure the birth of an heir, but his young wife died after giving birth to a daughter<sup>68</sup>. Fortunately Gasparo then remarried and had a son, averting a crisis (the same crisis that caused the nearly contemporary extinction of the Ferraboi branch) and set the S. Giovanni in Foro branch of the family on a more secure path. Between 1515 and 1557 the household grew to an extended stem family, a large and wealthy aristocratic household at the apex of Veronese society.

## 6. Conclusion

As we have seen, during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries many Verità moved about the city several times over the course of their lives, for a variety of reasons. Frequent movement was more characteristic of poorer households, widows (with or without young children) and young, recently married men. Poorer households, perhaps searching for a better situation, moved about regularly and often lived in rented space. Widows with young children might move in search of protection from relatives and friends, as

<sup>67</sup> His three sons wrote wills in 1511 after the death of their father: ASVR, *Testamenti*, mazzo 103, 553-55.

<sup>68</sup> ASVr, *Anagrafi-Comune*, nos. 394, 396, 400.

might an elderly widow who chose to leave her dead husband's home. Wealthy, upwardly mobile men with young families often moved a few times before permanently establishing their households in a new *contrada* and achieving the financial success that supported the burdens of aristocratic social and cultural life. Young Verità men who moved away from the house where they were born probably did so because that house could not accommodate them and their families comfortably. The large residences of the most successful branches of the family seem to have commanded the strongest allegiance, and young men in these branches were more likely to accommodate themselves to suit the house than were those men born in houses that were less important to their branch in the long run. By the later sixteenth century, when each of the three wealthy branches of the family consolidated its property and its offspring in a single *contrada*, the tax assessments of the poorer branches were much lower than those of their distant, wealthy relatives, and they had established their households in more humble, artisanal areas of the city. Also by the later sixteenth century there was no residential continuity connecting a particular line of the family to the *contrade* their ancestors had lived in at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and the Verità households listed in the *estimo* were scattered all over the city<sup>69</sup>.

The stories told above suggest that the frequent formation and re-formation of noble households played an important role in Verona's expansive economic and urban development. As they moved around the city, making money and losing it, rebuilding and redecorating their domestic spaces, managing their increasingly complex domestic staffs, these families were forging a new system of elite urban living. Although the data surveyed in this essay privilege the Verità men as household heads, their mothers, wives and sisters were all extremely important protagonists in each family story. The pursuit of a family's status, wealth and political influence increasingly occurred within these domestic spaces, and the women in charge of these spaces were essential to the family's success. Every time a married couple moved and set up a new household in a new neighborhood their decision to do so was based on a complex set of patrimonial, demographic, and emotional factors, and closely tied to their position in a mobile and porous aristocratic elite where bilateral kinship ties created by intermarriage were extremely powerful. In every case the establishment of a new household required the deployment of an increasingly expensive array of home furnishings and domestic servants that were needed to sustain the aristocratic identity of the household. Far from collecting in the dusty corners of noble palaces that rarely changed hands, these domestic furnishings were regularly bought and sold at auction, circulating among the men and women of elite families as the households

<sup>69</sup> Some direct descendants of the fifteenth-century Falsorgo branch returned to the *contrada* of Falsorgo in the early seventeenth century, but not to their ancestral home, which was sold by Michele and Giacomo Verità in the early 1550s, when they moved to S. Fermo.

themselves were formed and reformed<sup>70</sup>. Whether upwardly or downwardly mobile, the men and women who created and managed these households understood that they faced a delicate balancing act as they negotiated status, political alliances and economic opportunities in the dynamic society of Renaissance Verona. The demographic and fiscal records examined in this essay reveal just how fragile many of these households were in the long run.

<sup>70</sup> The buying and selling of luxurious domestic furnishings in Venice and Florence has recently attracted scholarly attention: see Allerston, Calvi and Ajmar-Wollheim. For Verona, see Smith 1998.

## Appendix

### Number of Verità Households in the estimo and Fluctuations in Their Tax Assessments, 1409-1635

Inclusion in the columns "Up" and "Down" means increases or decreases of more than s. 5 since the previous estimo; inclusion in the column "Steady" means variations of s. 5 or less. The column "New" indicates the number of households established since the previous estimo. Source: ASVr, CE regs. 249-273.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Households</i>	<i>Up</i>	<i>Down</i>	<i>Steady</i>	<i>New</i>
1409	5				
1418	5	3	0	2	0
1425	7	2	2	1	2
1433	8	3	2	1	2
1443	8	3	4	0	1
1447	7	4	1	2	0
1456	8	4	0	3	1
1465	7	4	0	3	0
1473	9	4	1	1	4
1482	13	2	5	1	5
1492	18	5	6	1	6
1502	19	5	3	6	5
1515	19	6	2	6	5
1518	19	5	1	13	0
1531	17	7	1	3	6
1545	18	6	3	3	7
1558	18	7	5	3	3
1572	20	2	7	7	3
1584	18	4	4	7	3
1595	15	5	5	2	3
1605	17	5	2	5	5
1616	15	3	5	4	3
1627	14	1	6	4	3
1635	12	3	2	6	1



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#### Abstract

This essay presents a demographic and economic survey of all Verità households in Verona during the first two centuries of Venetian rule, in order to examine the changing nature of local élites in Terraferma cities, a theme that was of great interest to Benjamin G. Kohl. Veronese noble families that maintained or improved their economic and social position during this period did so by adapting to rapidly changing circumstances, and developing a wide range of strategic solutions to meet these challenges. In the Verità family there were high levels of instability and decline among many households and branches in the family, as well as cases of rapid and spectacular increases in wealth. Allegiance to the patriline was both a powerful ideal and a source of practical support, but household heads used it selectively as they made their way in the world. Maintaining the economic independence of individual branches and households was the fundamental principle of estate organization among members of this family, as will be shown by a detailed discussion of the division of the estate of Gabriele Verità in 1439. The social geography of the family (with some exceptions) was characterized by residential independence throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

#### Keywords

Middle Ages; 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century; Verona; society; social mobility; household; prosopography; Verità family

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